



## Enhancing Environmental Education: The Role Of Parks



### **Congressional Action:**

NCLI authorizes funding for the development and implementation of state environmental literacy plans, teacher professional development grants and an Environmental Education Grant Program.

The legislation specifies funding levels for all programs except the Environmental Education Grant Program. This is the only area of the legislation that lists park and recreation agencies as an eligible partner.

NRPA calls on Congress to amend the proposed No Child Left Inside Act (S. 866 and H.R. 2054) to ensure parks and recreation agencies are defined as eligible funding partners for all programs within the Act and to include NCLI in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

### **Background:**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is commonly known as “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB), links the allocation of federal dollars for education to specific performance goals holding schools across the country accountable for academic improvement based on standardized tests. Since funding is tied primarily to reading and math test scores, the preponderance of instruction at elementary and secondary schools across the nation now focuses on these two subjects. This has produced an unintended loss of instruction time in environmental education, as many schools have been forced to devote more time and resources to improving reading and math scores.

Additionally, children are spending more time in front of the TV and less time outside exploring nature. The result is that many children are not educated about their environment and do not grasp the responsibility they have to become stewards of their environment as they grow to adulthood.

### **NCLI Legislation:**

This bill seeks to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), by:

- Encouraging the development and implementation of State environmental literacy plans;
- Establishing a grant program for professional development in the area of environmental education; and
- Establishing an environmental education grant program to expand environmental education curriculum throughout the country.

NCLI does not implement unfunded mandates-participation is voluntary. For educational agencies within a state to receive NCLI grant funding, the state educational agency must develop and implement a state environmental literacy plan.

### **Authorized Appropriations:**

\$100 million annually for FY10-FY14

### **The Case For Parks and Recreation:**

Local and State park agencies are uniquely positioned to assist in the expansion of environmental education curricula as envisioned in NCLI. Undoubtedly, local and state park systems are the best and most logical partners to help schools and education agencies across the country develop truly effective environmental education programs. These agencies provide:

- Easy and safe accessibility to nature and the outdoors;
- A wide variety of unique learning opportunities that serve to increase reading and math scores;
- Trained and knowledgeable staff, such as interpretive naturalists, and wildlife biologists provide benefit to students and teachers through “field” learning experiences at nature centers, science centers, demonstration farms, and in park and wildlife refuges;
- Many local, urban, county, regional, and state park systems currently work with school systems to provide environmental education programs.